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MEDIATISED IMAGES OF JAPAN IN EUROPE:
THROUGH THE MEDIA KALEIDOSCOPE

MUTUAL IMAGES

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AURORE YAMAGATA-MONTOYA, MAXIME DANESIN & MARCO PELLITTERI

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THROUGH THE MEDIA KALEIDOSCOPE

EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI & CHRISTOPHER J. HAYES

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Editorial

Marco PELLITTERI & Christopher J. HAYES | Shanghai International Studies University, China; Cardiff University, UK

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Dear readers, students, fellow scholars,
welcome to this sixth instalment of *Mutual Images*.

This Editorial is co-signed by the journal's director, Marco Pellitteri, and by one of the main members and collaborators of Mira, Christopher J. Hayes: Chris, in fact, is responsible for the second section of this issue and has contributed in many ways to make this issue possible.

The present issue is, overall, divided into three sections: the first two sections are devoted to research articles, and the third section is devoted to book reviews and exhibition reviews (more on the contents we offer in this issue later on). In this sense, we are happy to notice that *Mutual Images*, as a journal, is steadily growing and putting up some muscles, thanks to the continuous enthusiasm that young and senior researchers from many countries accord to our association and its initiatives. As an open-journal and open-access publication, *Mutual Images* journal is still young, but it is getting good results in two senses: among scholars, it is increasingly seen as a place in which interdisciplinary research papers can be submitted, seriously assessed and improved under the standards of a strict double blind peer review process; and formally, thanks to the progressive inclusion in academic indexes and cataloguing systems, which are a primary resource and parameter of recognition for academic journals. The road is still long, though, if anything, because many such indexes include new publications mainly on the basis of steady and long-term productivity in terms of issues published (and other criteria on which we will not bore readers further).

Let us talk about this issue of *Mutual Images*.

This particular edition of the journal stems from two of our recently held events and is, partly, a continuation of the fifth issue, namely as far as the first section of this instalment is concerned. In fact, in the first section we propose, as a follow-up to the previous issue,

two more and last articles drawn from papers presented at the symposium that Mira co-organised at Aoyama Gakuin University in November 2017, *Japan Pop Goes Global: Japanese Pop Culture on Aesthetics and Creativity*. As explained in the Editorial of *Mutual Images*, no. 5, we divided the presentation of the Aoyama symposium in two issues of the journal, and the papers presented here close the circle. Moreover, still in the first section, to the two papers from the Aoyama Gakuin symposium we have added a third article that matches the areas of interest of the other two essays (more on this later). A short note about the Aoyama Gakuin event: its aim was to reflect on Japanese pop culture's growing influence on contemporary visual arts, charting its progress as it makes its way across geopolitical barriers and arrives at the crossroads of culture, memory, and technology of the present day. The event was divided into three themes/sections: 'Adapting and Transforming Folktales in the Contemporary Period', 'Cultural Industries Across Borders', and 'Creating and Re-Creating Meaning'. For further information on the original deployment of the symposium *Japan Pop Goes Global*, please refer to Mutualimages.org.

The first article, titled 'Layers of the Traditional in Popular Performing Arts: Object and Voice as Character: *Vocaloid Opera AOI*', is authored by Krisztina Rosner. The piece delves into the relatively new area of research on how human and nonhuman subjects interact in the performing arts. In particular, the article uses as case study a new and intriguing form of spectacle and contemporary popular art, the 'Vocaloid', that is, the computerised simulation of a singer (or, more specifically, a new form of musical instrument/software that creates humanlike voices) able to interact with human artists, or that can be 'played' by human performers. The musical work analysed, *Vocaloid Opera AOI*, is at the threshold between past and future in its getting deep inspiration from Japanese classic literature (*Genji monogatari*) and other forms of folkloric art, such as the *bunraku* (puppet theatre). As Rosner writes: "The representations of the Aoi character as object, body, body-object [...] and the changes in the dramaturgical-performative role of object and voice modulates the Cartesian division of body and mind and the human vs. nonhuman hierarchy in theatre". If this new form of techno-artistic *pastiche* is to be assessed as postmodernism or post-humanism, or as a little of both, or something even different and more advanced and complex, is the theoretical duty of the readers after absorption of this compelling essay.

The second article is signed by Nargiz Balginbayeva and is titled 'The Re-creation of *Yōkai* Character Images in the Context of Contemporary Japanese Culture: An Example of the *Yōkai Watch* Anime Series". It is a rich discussion on the ways 'monsters' have been visually

represented in Japanese folk and then popular culture. In part drawn from a wider research by the author, this paper is informative and insightful because, besides unravelling several important themes of the key *tòpos* of supernatural and monstrous creatures in Japan's folklore as later adapted into contemporary pop/ular culture, it potentially lends itself to a network of connections with related topics. One of which is, for instance, the process of 'monstering' and 'self-Orientalisation' constantly ongoing in Japanese contemporary culture facing the gaze of the Other (mainly, Euro-American observers); and another one, on an opposite side, is the trend of what we could here call 'de-monstering' of monsters, the tendency in Japanese popular culture to re-represent as pretty and cute legendary creatures which were before drawn, painted, and told as scary and menacing, thus following the trends of so-called *kawaiisation* of reality and visual symbols in part of Japanese pop culture (for further reference on these two complementary themes, besides Balginbayeva's article, see for instance Miyake, 2014 and Pellitteri, 2018).

The third article of the first part of this issue, as we anticipated above, is not specifically based on a paper given at the 2017 Aoyama Gakuin University symposium: it was selected from the submissions we received after putting out a public Call for Papers for this issue, but nonetheless it was chosen because it complements the other pieces and is on topic with respect to the themes and prerogatives of that initiative. Titled 'From *kawaii* to sophisticated beauty ideals: A case study of Shiseidō beauty print advertisements in Europe' and authored by Oana Birlea, the article delves into the longitudinal strategies of visual communication by a leading cosmetics company from Japan. Connecting the dots between policies of woman's representations, ideas of nation and of the (forced) ideals of womanhood, 'whiteness' and 'Asianness' in Japanese official and non-official cultures, the essay raises a quantity of critical issues related to the constraints and cultural cages in which the notions of femininity—and of a 'Japanese femininity'—have been struggling for decades, and still do, in the Japanese as well as in the European media. The article is particularly interesting, among other features, in that it extends the field of research on Japanese culture from the anthropological and literary perspectives (the most frequently explored and used in recent articles published on *Mutual Images*) to an analysis of fashion media and advertising, which are all but secondary lenses through which to observe the features and changes of contemporary Japan (or any given country). More cogently in relation to the previous article by Balginbayeva, which also deals with the notion of *kawaii*, Birlea uses as one of her analytical categories the concept of *kawaii* as suggested or

promoted in the visual strategies of the cosmetics advertising campaigns discussed, presenting to the reader the factual reality that the *kawaii* styles and aesthetics are not at all (only) part of a manga/anime subculture but, rather, an integrated sector of Japan's mainstream culture that long predates the 1970s or 1980s, as some past anthropological research suggested or implied. This article presents interesting facts and a general historical parable of Shiseidō's campaigns in Europe, and can become a good starting point for deeper and more articulated and comparative analyses on the theme of representations of Japan in advertisements addressed to foreign markets.

The second part of this issue stems from the sixth *Mutual Images* international workshop, which was co-organised by Mira with Christopher J. Hayes, and was held at Cardiff University (UK) on 1st and 2 May 2018. Held also through the support that Hōsō Bunka Foundation granted to Marco Pellitteri for his research activities in the fiscal year 2017-18, the workshop saw speakers from many countries participate in two days of academic exchange and discussion. The articles contained within the journal's second section represent the culmination of this workshop, but also the broader salience of the issues of representation. The title of the workshop and, subsequently, of the whole issue you are about to read, is 'Mediatised Images of Japan in Europe: Through the Media Kaleidoscope'. In past issues of *Mutual Images*, the journal has been concerned with images of Japan in Europe and vice-versa. Building upon this, this instalment focusses on the mediatisation of these images, that is the ways in which the media (however defined) shape discourse, interpretations and understandings about images.

It is therefore worth considering the title of this issue for a brief moment. What are 'mediatised images'? And what do we mean by the 'media kaleidoscope'?

First of all, as you are most likely aware, kaleidoscope most commonly refers to a children's toy, one that works by positioning two reflective surfaces titled at each other at an angle within a tube, at one end of which is coloured glass and various colourful materials. By turning the tube, the image changes, creating symmetrical patterns as the objects shift, multiplied by the mirrors. The image changes whenever the tube is rotated and it is never the same. The observer only ever sees the objects in the tube through these reflections and abstractions. They are given a sense of the shapes and the colours of the objects within, but never see the objects as they actually are. A similar toy, the prismscope, allows the view to see the image directly in front of them broken up and rearranged, refracted through a prism.

The media are a lot like a kaleidoscope or a prismscope: as observers, we are shown an object, an event, or some other matter of enquiry, but the image that is received is not complete. Depictions in the media are affected by the kind of media through which they are transmitted, be it a static image, a sound or a video; a short news report will offer 500 words on a subject, whereas a television documentary may dedicate an hour or longer to exploring it. Motivation is also important. One has to consider where depictions come from, who created them, and why. The depiction of Japan in the U.S. media in 1943 will be very different to the depiction of Japan in the Italian media of 2019.

Lastly, as a closing musing for this Editorial, it is important not to forget the title of this journal, 'Mutual Images'. As much as Japan is fragmented in European depictions, be they historical accounts or contemporary media depictions, Europe is also filtered through the Japanese lens. In previous issues of *Mutual Images*, Maxime Danesin (2016, 2017) has examined the use of medieval Europe and Norse mythology as settings in manga, whilst Hernández-Pérez (2017) has looked at how Spain's cultural heritage has been represented and *mis*represented in anime. The kaleidoscope and fragmentary effect of the media lens is a universal phenomenon, and one that, as this issue shows, is not limited to recent representation. As stated earlier, it is our job as academics to continue to challenge and interrogate misrepresentation when we see it and to promote mutual understanding between Japan and Europe, and, as we will be starting to explore in the next issues, between Asia more in general and Europe. Indeed, among the further steps of this journal, there is the gradual extension of our investigation field to the wider Asian region: China, Hong Kong, Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, India, and other countries. As written just above, we do like challenges, and we know that the notion of mutual images can and should be applied to a variety of combinations, settings, and scenarios—as it will.

But for now, please enjoy this sixth issue of *Mutual Images*.

Marco PELLITTERI, *Main Editor*

Christopher J. HAYES, *Member of the Editorial Board*

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